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SUBJECT: CHAVEZ GIVES IRANIAN LEADER WARM WELCOME; SIGNS MORE  
AGREEMENTS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: President Hugo Chavez provided a warm welcome to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during his November 24-26 visit to Venezuela, declaring he and his Iranian counterpart were , "together to the end." The Iranian's visit attracted small protests from student, Venezuelan Jewish and opposition groups. Local political pundits have questioned the benefits of such close relations, noting that the nearly 300 agreements with Iran have yielded very little in Venezuela. During a signing ceremony of an additional 12 agreements, Chavez mocked Department spokesman Ian Kelly's comments regarding Iran's nuclear program, support for terrorism and human rights. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Following his cordial visit in Bolivia, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez gave Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a warm welcome during his two day visit to Caracas. Chavez called Ahmadinejad an "anti-imperialist gladiator," and a "valiant brother." The Iranian leader returned the compliment, declaring he felt "at home with brothers" when visiting "his revolutionary friends" in Venezuela. The Iranian Embassy and two Caracas hotels hosting the delegation were the sites of small protests by political parties, student and Jewish groups. Maribel Castillo, Secretary General of the Patria Para Todos party, told the press, "on the International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women...the government hosts the leader of a country where women are stoned to death."

¶3. (SBU) Using a satellite link to San Carlos in the central state of Cojedes, the two Presidents inaugurated an Iranian built public housing project. According to press reports, behind the scenes, a 70-man business delegation worked to find investment opportunities in agriculture, energy, trade and basic industries. The newspaper Tal Cual, in a front page editorial, noted that only 400 of 10,000 homes announced in 2007 had been built by Iran, a mere 5,000 of the expected 100,000 bicycles were built in 2008, and less than a third of the 2008 goal of 16,000 joint Iranian-Venezuelan automobiles had been assembled. Similarly, planned oil refineries, aircraft plants and explosives factories only exist on paper. Tal Cual assured readers not to worry about nuclear power in Venezuela and that the "aspiring autocrat and Persian satrap" were merely making noises.

¶4. (SBU) During a November 26 signing ceremony for an additional 12 agreements on energy and infrastructure, Chavez mocked Department spokesman Ian Kelly's November 25 comments regarding Iran and the concerns of the international community regarding nuclear weapons, terrorism and human rights: "The world is worried about the United States violating human rights." Referring to Posada Carilles, Chavez asked, "Why doesn't the Obama administration extradite this continent's father of terrorists?"  
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